



Lafayette Historical Society

NEWS

Enlightening Our Community

Lafayette, California

April 2025

Vol.52, No.2

Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

LE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE PROGRAMS



Join the Acalanes Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Lafayette Historical Society on **Thursday, April 3, at 7:00 pm** in the Community Hall at the Lafayette Library for a lecture by Guy-Noel Benoit, Franco-American member of The American Friends of La Fayette. Guy-Noel will discuss Le Marquis de LaFayette's pivotal role in the American Revolution, his friendship with George Washington, his

long involvement in the French revolution and politics, and his 1824 return as the "Nation's Guest." There will be a travelling exhibit of six panels that will be on display in the lobby of the Lafayette Library from April 3-28. On **Friday, April 4 from 10-12**, Guy-Noel Benoit will be available in the lobby to answer questions about the life and legacy of LaFayette. On **Saturday, April 5, at 11:30 am**, a fife-and-drum procession will lead to Plaza Park for a City proclamation and wreath-laying at LaFayette's statue, marking the 200th anniversary of his historic journey. We hope you will join us in a celebration of this remarkable legacy.

LAFAYETTE

Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier was born in France in 1757 and inherited the title of Marquis de LaFayette at a young age due to his father's early death. LaFayette and his future wife Adrienne entered into an arranged marriage when they were 14 and 12 years of the age. LaFayette wanted to be a soldier but there were no on-going wars so in 1777 when he came of age, he sailed for America to fight against England in the Revolutionary War. He believed that the American

Revolution embodied all of the principles he believed in. He had no combat or leadership experience so General George Washington took him under his wing. LaFayette served as the go-between between France and the Americans. He worked to get France to provide supplies, money and troops to the Revolutionary Army.

After winning the respect of American generals, LaFayette was given more responsibility and eventually was allowed to formally lead American troops. He realized how poorly supplied American troops were and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of his own fortune to help support the colonial army.

By 1780, Major General LaFayette was commanding nearly 2,200 American troops and was viewed as the official representative of France to the American army. He was able to convince France to deliver troops to assist the colonial army. These additional soldiers helped to defeat the British at the Battle of Yorktown. After the war ended, LaFayette returned to France and joined noblemen who favored a revolution in their own country. After the storming of the Bastille in 1789, he was made Commander in Chief of the National Guard.

He championed a limited monarchy with a democratically elected senate but the monarchy was overthrown in 1792. LaFayette was considered a traitor and fled from France and was imprisoned for five years. In 1797, with help from James Monroe and President George Washington, LaFayette was released by Napoleon.

After Napoleon was overthrown and the monarchy was restored, LaFayette remained inactive until 1830 when he took part in his third national revolution. At the age of 73, LaFayette commanded the Army of the National Guard that drove Charles X from France and placed Louis-Philippe, the “citizen king”, on the throne.

In 1824, nearly 30 years after his first victory in America, LaFayette visited the US on a farewell tour. During the visit the United States Congress voted to give him \$200,000 and twenty-five thousand acres of Federal lands. During his tour when he visited all 24 of the United States, he noted that many towns and cities in the US had chosen to name themselves after him, the French hero who had played such an important role in helping the American army defeat the British.



LaFayette died on May 20, 1824 at the age of 76 and is buried in the Picpus Cemetery in Paris. An American flag flies over the site and there is soil from the battlefield at Bunker Hill spread on his grave. Every Fourth of July, the Mayor of Paris, the United States Ambassador, and the Daughters of the American Revolution gather for ceremonies at his grave.

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WHY ARE WE LAFAYETTE, CALIFORNIA?

Benjamin Shreve came across the Plains to California in 1852, perhaps in search of gold. Records place him in this area in the month of September 1852 and also in the Summer of 1853. It was said that in 1853 Shreve decided to return East from the gold mines via San Francisco but en route through Contra Costa County he accepted an offer from Elam Brown to teach school near Lafayette and taught there through the Winters of 1853/1854. In 1855 he began a merchandise trade. Shreve's store was set up on the road "from the Redwoods" (Moraga) in the proximity of his wife's family who lived near the blacksmith shop.



In 1857 Shreve petitioned Congress to establish a post office at his place and then gave it the name of Centerville, but owing to there being a post office of the same name in the state, had to change it and thus named it after the great French General, LaFayette.

Considering the date of establishment of the post office, Shreve must have requested a name before 1857 because communications then were not speedy. After the denial of the name Centerville it is easily imagined that some discussion among those who came to Shreve's store took place and the fact that Shreve's wife Adaline, her father, Medford Gorham (whose sons lived nearby), another Gorham daughter Mary who was George Hammet's wife, George himself, David Hodges (with two or three of his sons not too far away), and two married daughters in the vicinity, all with the likelihood of having come to California from Lafayette County, Wisconsin, might have influenced the choosing of the name.



Shreve's admiration for the "great French General" must have been a later thought as he had made Centerville his first choice for a name for this community.

The National Archives provided some information on post offices in Contra Costa County. LaFayette Post Office was established on March 2, 1857, which was the date of the appointment of Benjamin Shreve as Postmaster. At first the town was spelled LaFayette but was later changed to Lafayette.

REMEMBERING LA RUE RESTAURANT

Karl Johann Niederer was born on September 3, 1930, in the picturesque town of Gersau, Switzerland. From a young age, he honed his skills as both a butcher and a chef, laying the foundation for a lifelong passion for the culinary arts.

In 1955, eager to explore new horizons, Karl left Switzerland for Canada, where he refined his craft at renowned establishments such as the Digby Pines Resort in Nova Scotia and several locations in Saskatchewan. Yet, despite his promising career, his heart remained in Switzerland, with his beloved fiancée, Trudy Haessig. Before long, Trudy joined him, and in 1956, the couple married, embarking on a journey that would leave a lasting mark on the world of fine dining. Their thirst for adventure led Karl, Trudy, and their six-week-old son, Rudy, to California in 1957. Karl quickly became a fixture in the Bay Area's vibrant culinary scene, showcasing his expertise at venues such as Bimbo's 365, the San Francisco Yacht Club, Station J, and the Athenian Nile Club.



In 1962, their family grew with the birth of their second son, Marcel, marking another joyous milestone. That same year, Karl and Trudy proudly became United States citizens, solidifying their roots in their adopted homeland. A decade later, in 1972, Karl's dream of owning a restaurant became a reality when he purchased La Rue at 3738 Mt. Diablo Boulevard, adjacent to the Hillside Motel. Over the next ten years, the family poured their hearts into the restaurant, transforming it into a beloved destination for fine dining in the Bay Area. La Rue quickly earned a reputation for its gourmet cuisine and welcoming atmosphere. Karl's culinary mastery, paired with

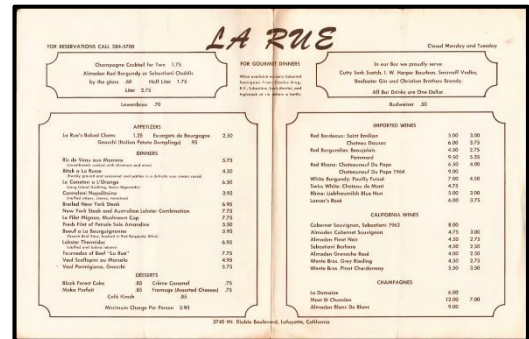
Trudy's warm and gracious hospitality as the "hostess with the mostest," created an unforgettable dining experience. Signature dishes such as Tournedos of Beef "La Rue," Le Caneton à L'Orange (Long Island Duckling), and the ever-popular Potage Parisienne (Potato Leek Soup) became cherished favorites, drawing diners back time and again. His Potato Leek Soup was selected as a featured recipe in Gourmet magazine, and in 1983 and 1984, the restaurant received the prestigious Silver Spoon Award from the Gourmet Diners Club of America.

Whether celebrating anniversaries, birthdays, or special milestones, guests left La Rue with fond memories and full hearts. After a decade of success, Karl stepped away from the restaurant business to embrace a new chapter filled with diverse passions. He dedicated his time to sausage-making, skiing, fishing, camping with his family, golfing, woodworking, and traveling. Yet, even in retirement, his love for cooking never waned. Hosting gatherings and delighting friends and family with his culinary creations remained a cherished part of his life. Karl passed away in 2005, leaving behind a legacy of warmth, hospitality, and exceptional cuisine.

LA RUE'S FAMOUS POTATO LEEK SOUP RECIPE

Ingredients:

The white part of two medium leeks diced
 1 1/2 cup finely minced onions
 8 tablespoons butter
 3 tablespoons flour
 8 cups chicken stock
 1 cup heavy cream
 Salt to taste
 4 cups diced potatoes



Instructions:

In a large pot, gently cook the onions and leeks in 4 tablespoons of butter for two to three minutes, ensuring they do not brown. Add the flour and mix well, then gradually stir in the chicken stock and salt. Bring to a boil, stirring continuously. Add the diced potatoes and reduce heat to a simmer until the potatoes are tender. Remove from heat and blend in the remaining butter and heavy cream. Adjust seasoning to taste and serve warm.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2025

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their membership or have made a donation:

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

Stu Swiedler
 The Flynn Family
 Patricia Stull
 Garrett Fraetis
 Judith Jordan
 Nancy Flood
 Annie Lescroart
 Nancy Buonaccorsi

Susie & Ray Parker
 Trudy Salter
 Jeff Crenshaw
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 Glen Zamanian
 The Questers/Todos Santos Chapter #233
 Michelle Fanto-Chan
 Allen & Kathy Hopkins

Cooper Ogden
 Richard Silbert
 Frank Barham
 Carol Singer
 Jane Minor
 Kirk Allen
 NVIDIA
 John Kennett

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your membership is exceedingly important as it makes it possible for our organization to pay annual rent to the City of Lafayette for our space and be able to pay for our phone, insurance, and other needed supplies. Donations are always appreciated.

Student Membership: \$15 ~ Individual Membership: \$30 ~ Family Membership: \$60



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LHS

**Board of Directors
2025**

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Thank you to Michelle Fanto-Chan for sponsoring this newsletter issue!



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